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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000642

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
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TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER PINR ASEC FAIR CASC SA IR

USUN, LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: GEAGEA PROPOSES ARAB PEACEKEEPERS; A STRONG SINIORA IS PLANNING A TELEVISED ADDRESS SATURDAY

REF: BEIRUT 640

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea, in a surprise visit to the Embassy Friday night (May 9), stressed the importance of strengthening Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, Lebanese Armed Forces Commander Michel Sleiman, and the Siniora government. He mentioned the idea of an Arab peacekeeping force in Lebanon, an idea which we understand was first proposed by the Saudis. He also informed us that he has between 7,000 to 10,000 fighters ready to be mobilized, adding that they would need weapons. Mohammed Chatah, senior advisor to PM Siniora, said the PM and other GOL leadership at the Grand Serail remain strong, and Siniora was planning on a televised address the following day, May ¶10. End summary.

GOL MUST BE PROTECTED

¶2. (C) Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea, accompanied by advisor Elie Khoury, made a surprise visit at 2030 on May 9 to the Embassy, immediately following the five-hour meeting with 50 members of March 14 at his residence (reftel). The Charge told Geagea that the March 14 declaration was very good. Geagea reported that March 14 sent a delegation to Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and another, led by his wife, MP Setrida Geagea, to Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander Michel Sleiman. Geagea said the latter delegation was blunt in delivering the message to Sleiman. The delegation implored General Sleiman to ensure the security of the Grand Serail, where Prime Minister Siniora lives and works, and the residences of all of the key political figures. If these institutions and their leaders stand fast, he said, we will win this round. The Charge concurred, saying that the Grand Serail in particular is a national symbol as well as a place of business.

¶3. (C) Geagea confirmed that Hizballah was pressuring PM Siniora to resign, but that while some of Siniora's (unnamed) advisors reportedly were contemplating the option earlier this morning, the PM is refusing. He added that Saad, who he noted is "keeping very strong," also opposed a resignation from Siniora. Geagea requested the Charge to put a great

deal of pressure on Sleiman and to back Siniora up "all the way." He also suggested the Charge talk to Saad and March 14/Progressive Socialist Party leader Walid Jumblatt to "keep their spirits high."

ARAB PEACEKEEPING FORCE
WOULD STRENGTHEN GOL

¶4. (C) Geagea proposed requesting friendly Arab countries to dispatch an Arab peacekeeping force to Lebanon. He recommended lobbying Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, and other countries supportive of Lebanon, to agree to send troops. He estimated that 5,000 troops would be sufficient. Geagea said that such a force would be a practical way to strengthen the Siniora government. If the Arab countries agree to send a peacekeeping force, Geagea said, "Hizballah will be in trouble. It will be a victory, even if the Arab troops don't wind up coming." He added that a UN or EU force were not good options.

¶5. (C) Geagea then asked to speak privately to the Charge. It was important for everyone to push the LAF to do its job, said Geagea. However, he wasn't sure that the army would succeed. If the army failed to protect Christian areas, Geagea said he wanted to make sure Washington knows he has between 7,000 and 10,000 well-trained Lebanese Forces fighters who could be mobilized. "We can fight against Hizballah," he stated with confidence, adding, "We just need your support to get arms for these fighters. If the airport is still closed, amphibious deliveries could be facilitated."

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The Charge assured Geagea that the U.S. was encouraging Sleiman and the LAF to protect state institutions and the citizens of Lebanon. (Note: At 2315, Geagea telephoned the Charge to relay that his morale had been boosted by a telephone call from NEA A/S Welch. End note.)

STILL STRONG PM SINIORA WILL
MAKE TELEVISED ADDRESS MAY 10

¶6. (C) The Charge spoke to senior advisor to Prime Minister Siniora, Mohammed Chatah, at 2045. Chatah said the PM's spirits had been boosted by the Secretary's telephone call to him this evening. His mood was good, he noted, and the GOL officials also at the Grand Serail tonight were feeling strong. The Charge asked whether the fact that Siniora had been absent from the public eye had been a planned strategy or whether he was intending to engage publicly. Chatah replied that several ideas had come forward over the last 48 hours, including the possibility for a televised appearance. Siniora plans to address the nation on television on Saturday, May 10.

¶7. (C) Chatah commented that the idea of an Arab peacekeeping force had been put on the table by the Saudis. Siniora had not weighed in one way or the other, he added. When asked if Acting Foreign Minister Tareq Mitri was planning (or would even be able to attend) the Arab League foreign ministers' meeting scheduled for the upcoming weekend, Chatah said that Mitri's attendance had been discussed, but there had been no final decision made. Chatah also said that there had been some discussion at the Serail among the GOL leadership about the possibility of expanding the reach of UNIFIL under UN Security Council resolution 1701.

SISON